





DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Tunisia: The Hour of Separation Approaches



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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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I feel that the hour of separation is soon going to sound. I would like to be reassured on the future of this country, convinced of having left as successors men worthy of...continuing the work of Bourguiba. This must not perish after him.

Bourguiba, 15 Oct 70

Introduction

Habib Bourguiba, the dynamic 68-year-old leader who has dominated Tunisian politics for nearly 40 years, is moving reluctantly toward the end of his rule. Meanwhile, the government and the ruling Destourian Socialist Party are wrestling with the inter-related problems of decentralization of power and orderly presidential succession.

Two years ago, while recovering from a severe bout of viral hepatitis, Bourguiba faced a serious, and for him traumatic, crisis in which he had to reverse his agricultural policy.

His activities

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are circumscribed and closely monitored by his doctors. At best, his health is precarious, and he must pace his activities and avoid deep personal involvement in the daily affairs of government and party.

Bourguiba's rule has been pragmatic, paternalistic, highly personal, and autocratic. He wants to ensure a niche in history as the creator of a stable and respected nation-state. For the past decade he has time and again vacillated over the succession problem, but he has been reluctant to relax the reins of authority.

Many Tunisians leaders are well-schooled in the Bourguiba philosophy and should by able to govern effectively; competition among candidates for succession is keen as they maneuver for political backing. All are basically pro-West, but none so openly aligns himself with the US as Bourguiba.



BOURGUIBA

- 1. Assessing Tunisia's body politic requires insight into the personality of its chief architect, who calls himself the "supreme combatant." Habib Bourguiba was born in 1903 at Monastir in the heart of the Sahel, a rich agricultural plain of eastern Tunisia which produced most of the country's pre-independence political leaders, bureaucrats, and intellectuals. He entered politics in the late 1920s after completing his education in French schools in Tunis and France. With other young intellectuals, almost all educated in France, he sought to revitalize the nationalist, but cautious, Destour (constitution) party that represented the interests of the small Tunisian bourgeoisie and landed gentry.
- 2. These efforts failed, and in 1934 Bourguiba and his peers broke away from the Destour to form the Neo-Destour party, now called the Destourian Socialist Party. The new party sought a mass, rather than a select, membership. During his first 20 years, the party was more often than not suppressed and, operating clandestinely, evolved into a highly disciplined organization. In 1938 Bourguiba became the second president of the party, but spent most of the years until 1956 in prison or in exile.
- France's policy of repressing Tunisian nationalism was modified in 1954. From his prison cell, Bourguiba welcomed Premier Mendes-France's promise of self-government. Bourquiba's counsel to the Tunisian team during the arduous negotiations resulted in Tunisia's acceptance of limited autonomy, an admitted half loaf but better than none to Bourguiba. He was permitted to return home in mid-1955 to a hero's welcome. Nine months later, after Morocco had gained independence, Bourquiba persuaded France to give Tunisia its independence also. He became the first post-independence prime minister, and in July 1957, when the constituent assembly proclaimed Tunisia a republic, he was selected as the country's provisional president. Since the constitution was adopted in 1959, Bourquiba has been





re-elected for three five-year terms. His present and constitutionally last term expires in November 1974; he is publicly committed to retire at that time.

4. When Bourguiba took charge of the government in April 1956, he faced the familiar problems of any small country with few natural resources. Most of Tunisia's wealth was held by foreigners. The vast majority of its 3.5 million people was illiterate and existed at subsistence level. A rebellion against foreign rule in Algeria that raged along Tunisia's western border brought serious problems; armed Algerian guerrillas who took refuge in Tunisia and hundreds of thousands of Algerian refugees. Bourguiba's open resistance to the extension of Nasir's influence into North Africa, his avowedly anti-Communist position, and his outspoken support of the West were politically hazardous in the milieu of a newly independent Arab country. Faced with profound ignorance, poverty, xenophobia, and the opposition of Pan-Arabists and religious traditionalists, Bourquiba sought to improve living conditions--particularly housing--expand and modernize education, train cadres for both business and government, create more efficient public and private enterprises, modernize and diversify agriculture, and improve the quality of family life and the status of women.

Bourguibism

Bourguibism accepts the battle when forced to do so and is always victorious.

--Bourguiba

5. Bourguiba's philosophy of government has been strongly influenced by his French education and early association with European socialists and liberals. Basically a humanist, he rejected Marxism and embraced a socialism designed to promote the self-development of individuals. His avowed goal is the creation of a fundamentally egalitarian and modern society, a "showcase of democracy."





6. In pursuit of this goal he has confronted the entrenched interests of foreign businesses and landowners, and the rich and powerful Tunisian families of the royal court. His programs to modernize Tunisian society have frequently run counter to Islamic practices and have often been greeted with suspicion, superstition, or apathy by the impoverished and ignorant. He restrained supporters who wanted to expel all foreigners. In maintaining a balance between divergent pressures, Bourguiba employed the techniques he had used in winning independence—to press forward; to be conciliatory, persuasive and patient; and if necessary, to back off until he could go forward again.

7. Although he publicly advocates democracy, Bourguiba in fact has maintained tight control over the government and party, making all major and many minor decisions and appointments. Tunisian democracy, he explains, must be guided carefully because the people still are politically immature.

a result, governmental efficiency has suffered, and the party has lost much of its earlier vitality. Both government and party have had difficulty in attracting intellectuals and youth.

Forces of Change Within the Power Structure

The Neo-Destour is not a private club. A person does not renounce his faculty of judgment by joining...I am sure that once the Neo-Destourian principles are assimilated by all, civic consciousness diffused everywhere, the problems understood by everyone, and the national welfare become the common goal, no Tunisian will remain outside the Party.

-- Bourguiba, 28 April 1963





- Since independence, party and state have for all practical purposes been synonymous; key party leaders have held the key offices in both the party's executive body--the political bureau-and the government. Many party leaders particularly at the local and regional level had initially been elected to office. As time went on Bourguiba began to select them himself. was discouraged. Anyone who persisted in opposing or failed to execute a specific policy could expect dismissal from the government and the party. Although no formal censorship has been instituted, the press and the other news media have become uniformly uncritical of Bourguiba and those surrounding him. When the press speaks harshly of an official, it is likely that he is either facing early oblivion or has already been dismissed.
- The cliques that are common within the monolithic political structure generally follow regional, ideological, and generation lines. The two dominant regional divisions are the Sahelians -inhabitants of the coastal area of eastern Tunisia where the party was formed and which supplied the early cadre--and the Tunisois--people born and living in or near the capital. The ideological split is between the conservatives (absolutists) who favor the retention of a strong, centralized authority and a controlled economy, and the liberals (reformists) who call for a more democratic party and government, relaxation of controls, and a freer economy. A generation gap exists between members of the party who were active in the thirties and forties and were imprisoned for their political activities and members born after about 1935. The older ones tend to be Sahelians and conservatives; the younger, Tunisois and liberal.
- 10. Since independence nearly 16 years ago, a whole new generation of Tunisians, better educated than their fathers, have entered the ranks of the party and bureaucracy. Most of them chafe under the regime's authoritarian and paternalistic practices. Many who supported the theory behind the





formation of business, service and agricultural cooperatives begun during the 1960s were troubled by the fact many cooperatives were imposed without the consent of the participants.

- Ahmed Mestiri, a member of this new generation, is the most prominent of Tunisia's liberals. He made his initial bid to rally support against forced cooperativization in January 1968. He was able to elicit only limited backing and publicly resigned as secretary of state for defense to dramatize his opposition. He was expelled from the party. Two years later, after the imposition of agricultural cooperatives was stepped up and aroused such widespread opposition that the policy had to be dropped, Mestiri was reintegrated into the party. He then helped formulate the program of expanding the authority of government and assembly announced by Bourquiba in June 1970. As executive secretary of the party's Superior Commission which was charged with drafting constitutional amendments and preparing for the quinquennial congress this fall, he was in an excellent position to press for changes in the system.
- 12. When the 1,000-member party congress was finally held in October, a groundswell of support for more democracy in the party and government became evident. After unexpectedly free discussion the delegates elected liberals to fill a majority of seats in the party's 58-member central committee. It was clear that most of the delegates were seeking new institutions and the free election of his successor when the ailing President steps down.
- 13. Bourguiba, however, backed by the Sahelian conservative minority, blocked this trend. Although a majority of the delegates had endorsed a proposal to change the existing procedure by which the prime minister would succeed to the presidency in the event of a vacancy, Bourguiba announced that Prime Minister Nouira was his choice as successor.





In spite of the clear consensus that the congress should elect the political bureau, the President announced he intended to appoint its members. Mestiri aired his frustrations to the foreign press, and Bourguiba suspended him from party activities. Ultimately Bourguiba submitted a hand-picked slate of 20 candidates to the central committee from which it elected the 14-man political bureau. The result was a largely conservative body. Even some liberals have criticized Mestiri for committing the unpardonable sin of discussing internal affairs with foreign press representatives. He will have to appear before a party disciplinary committee.

- 14. Despite the victory over the liberals, the ruling politicians—including Bourguiba—cannot be completely insensitive to the pressures for change. The liberals still have two forums—the party's central committee and the National Assembly—and they can be expected to make full use of both. Most prominent liberals will continue to work for evolutionary change, expecting that over the next year or so many of the propositions they support will be adopted.
- 15. By doggedly clinging to the status quo, the conservatives may see their fortunes decline still further. A leading conservative, 38-year-old Mohamed Sayah,

ment and reputed to be a current favorite of Bourguiba, Sayah failed to be elected to the central committee and therefore was not eligible for selection to the political bureau. Should Bourguiba die or his term expire coincident with an expansion of liberal influence, the conservatives might try to seize power. Sayah is the only Tunisian now prominent who seems ruthless enough to attempt a power grab.





Outside the Power Structure

- 16. Dissident groups outside the power structure are too small, disparate, and disorganized to exert much influence on political developments or to pose more than a remote threat to the country's stability. Followers of Salah ben Youssef, expelled from the party in 1955 and murdered in 1961--presumably on Bourguiba's orders--have long been actively plotting from exile to upset the Bourguiba regime. There are also a few adherents of Marxism, Trotskyism, Maoism, and various Pan-Arab movements. The small Tunisian Communist party, banned since 1963, has an estimated 100 members. Most political exiles eke out a living from small and diminishing foreign subsidies, occasional handouts from sympathizers, or what wages they can earn in an uncertain labor market.
- 17. Islam exerts a subtle moral influence in Tunisia. While emphasizing Muslim moral values, Bourguiba has consistently sought to eliminate religious customs that impede economic modernization. His efforts have been but partially successful. His campaign to downgrade the strict observance of Ramadan, the economically unproductive Moslem month of daytime fasting and nighttime feasting (he labeled it a luxury a developing nation could ill afford) has antagonized the country's religious leaders and been openly resisted by most Tunisians. Religious support is not likely to be a vital factor in any power struggle, however.
- 18. The backing of the generally apolitical military and security forces is crucial to any Tunisian government. Bourguiba and other authorities have been careful to isolate the military from politics. Despite his efforts to insulate the military from politics the cleavage between liberal and conservative factions has to some extent been reflected among the military officers, with senior officers generally favoring the conservatives and junior officers being 'ympathetic toward the liberals.





19. Students, traditionally the most fractious element of Tunisian society, are a most likely source of disaffection and discord. Most students have resisted party control over the student union. During the annual student union congress in August, a majority of the delegates—including some Destourians, leftists, Communists, and Arab nationalists—formed a "Democratic Front" which unsuccessfully tried to take control of the organization. The new leaders, imposed by the minority, can be expected to adhere to party direction, but there is a real question how much of a following the organization will command among the university students this year. In an effort to forestall potential troubles within the university, Nouira entered into a dialogue with student and youth leaders immediately after the party congress.

Current Issues

I intend that my work shall not be ephemeral and that my intervention in the history of this country shall not be an isolated phenomenon after which things return to normal, i.e., to instability, anarchy, and the divisions that have hurt us so much. The nation's cohesion must be deep enough so that it can, without damage, pursue its destiny after the artisan of its unity disappears (as the King of France disappeared after creating French unity).

--Bourguiba, 12 Mar 64

20. The overriding political issue of the day is presidential succession. For more than a decade, Bourguiba has frequently referred to his mortality, but has vacillated about what procedure should be followed in selecting a successor. In 1969 Bourguiba

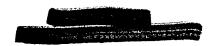




created the post of prime minister and named his longtime associate, Bahi Ladgham, to fill it. The National Assembly subsequently amended the constitution to provide that the prime minister succeed in the event of a presidential vacancy.

- 21. By June 1970 Bourguiba had laid down the broad outlines for constitutional revision, but he changed his mind again. He proposed that the Superior Commission of the party study the possibility of creating a post of vice president or of providing for the temporary succession of the president of the National Assembly to the presidency. That fall, he told an audience that he did not want to know who was going to succeed him and that his successor should be elected. A few days later he had dismissed Prime Minister Ladgham and named another long-time associate, Hedi Nouira, as prime minister. then, Bourguiba has frequently expressed full confidence in Nouira. He told the recent congress that Nouira should be his successor, adding that Foreign Minister Masmoudi and former interior minister Mestiri could wait their turn. Bourguiba also told the party congress that he would not seek re-election when his term expires. But he recently informed an American news correspondent that if his health permitted he would run again in 1974.
- 22. Bourguiba's interventions on the succession problem have complicated and delayed a solution. The liberals are likely to be more determined than ever that the constitution be amended to provide for an elected successor, while the conservatives will no doubt continue to support Bourguiba. Meanwhile, Nouira, although attempting to hew a neutral course, has lost his status as an arbiter.
- 23. Another controversial issue involves the authority of the National Assembly. The liberals and conservatives agree that Tunisia should retain a strong presidential system in which the president





establishes the broad outlines of policy. They also agree that the government, appointed and responsible to the President, should also be accountable to the National Assembly. They disagree over a proposal giving the National Assembly the right to censure the government. Only the liberal faction wants this.

- 24. A third issue is the relationship between the party and the various national organizations: labor, students, youth, women, artisans and agriculturalists. Most, if not all, of these groups have during the past decade been brought under tight party supervision and control. The labor and student groups, in particular, have resisted party domination and, reflecting the strong popular desire for more democracy within the government and party, may resume pressure for greater autonomy. There will also be demands for a complete restructuring of the party as outlined by Nouira last year. At that time he indicated that local units, or cells, would be represented at all levels of the party hierarchy and that party decisions would be made democratically, not dictated from the top.
- 25. The possibility of a multiparty political system was raised by the Superior Commission last year, but apparently has been shelved. Tunisia has had only one party since the small Communist Party was banned in 1963. Bourguiba and most party leaders continue to justify the one-party system on the ground that Tunisia, a poor nation, cannot afford competition between rival organizations. The watchword is still national unity within a single-party system.

A Hard Act to Follow

To govern people is a difficult art. To do it one must have the qualities of clairvoyance, intelligence, level-headedness, and often audacity.

Bourguiba, 25 July 67





26. Bourguiba is a part-time president, his government a lame duck regime. Presidential hopefuls are already jockeying for position. Conservatives will almost certainly strive to forestall any change in the present constitutional provisions for presidential succession, at least until Bourguiba's present term expires in November 1974. The liberal faction will work for institutions that will preclude another authoritarian leader.

Bourquiba's successor under present constitutional arrangements is HEDI NOUIRA. The President's designated heir has long been one of Bourguiba's most capable and efficient subordinates. The praise Bourquiba has consistently bestowed on Nouira in recent months has added to his already impressive credentials. He became secretary general of the ruling party in October, and as such he is de facto head of the party.

28. The 60-year-old Nouira received his university education in Paris. As a student, he joined the nationalist movement and has been active in the Neo-Des-



We must no longer watch the spectacle of an individual who commands and a community which executes.

Nouira, 9 April 1971

tour/Destourian Socialist Party both before and after independence. Nouira is considered to be the source of many of the moderate, pro-Western ideas adopted by Bourguiba and the party. A proponent of individual initiative, he is reputed to have been prominent among those who urged Bourguiba to reverse the controversial agricultural cooperative policy in 1969. He is said to be scrupulously honest and refuses favors to even his closest friends. He has little political base of his own.



29. The closest runnerup to Nouira in the succession stakes is BAHI LADGHAM, a leader of the liberal faction and, until last year, the President's closest associate and heir apparent. Ladgham had been the top administrator in the government from the beginning of the republic and served as secretary general of the party from 1955 until he was replaced by Nouira. He was the first chairman of the party's Superior Commission, but lost it to Nouira six months later. Bitterness over his demotion from prime minister and party chairmanship may



have been somewhat sweetened by demonstrations of support he received at the party congress when he obtained the greatest number of votes of any candidate for the party's central committee. The President did not propose his name for the political bureau, reportedly at Ladgham's own request.

- 30. Ladgham was born 58 years ago in a Tunis suburb and received his secondary education in Tunis. Ladgham was largely responsible for creating an effective party and a smoothly operating administration. His leadership of the Jordanian-Fedayeen Conciliation Mission last year won him the respect of many Arab governments. He is also widely respected by the Tunisian military services.
- 31. Foreign Minister MOHAMED MASMOUDI is another contender for the presidency. As foreign





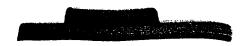
minister, he had mended Tunisia's fences with the Arab states to the east. year-old Masmoudi is reputed to be one of the principal leaders of the Sahelian faction of the party and to have a considerable following among students. Masmoudi, a protegé of Bourguiba, was educated in Tunis and the University of Paris. Since Tunisia's independence, he has twice so antagonized the president that Masmoudi was dismissed from his government posts and suspended from the party. most recent incident oc-

curred in 1961 when Masmoudi openly criticized the developing "cult of personality." The fact that Masmoudi has made a bid for the post of UN Secretary General may indicate that he considers his political chances at home slight.

Former interior minister AHMED MESTIRI, who was the executive secretary of the party's Superior Commission, is another presidential hopeful. The 46year-old Mestiri considers it essential that the government and the party be so "institutionalized" that a government upheaval is impossible. A strong advocate of ministerial responsibility, he has twice resigned government posts--in 1960 because members of the presidential entourage meddled in the affairs of his ministry and again in 1968 when he openly opposed the government's economic program. In 1968 he was expelled







from the party but was readmitted two years later He was dismissed as minister of the interior in early September because he objected to Bourguiba's appointment of new governors and a new chief of national security prior to the party congress. At the party congress, he received the second highest number of votes of any candidate elected to the party's central committee, but Bourguiba suspended him from party activity a few days later for making "seditous" statements to the foreign press. Although widely criticized for his maverick tendencies, Mestiri probably could count on widespread support in an open election.



MOHAMED SAYAH, minister for public works and housing, gained Bourguiba's ear and confidence during the President's most recent convalescence in Switzerland. At that time the 38-year-old Tu-1nisian was his country's representative to the UN agencies in Geneva. He was appointed to the party's Superior Commission in August, but because he failed to be elected to the party's central committee in October, he holds no national party office. He is dynamic, able, extremely ambitious,

As a leading conservative, he is bitterly op-

posed to Mestiri. He was a student leader and radical leftist before joining the establishment and may still have a considerable following among leftist intellectuals.





Although the Presi-34. dent's only son, HABIB BOUR-GUIBA JR., has no personal political support, he cannot be discounted entirely as a presidential contender. In the right political atmosphere, he might be chosen to succeed his father. Bourquiba Jr. has served as a member of the Superior Commission and was elected to the party's central committee. The 44-year-old former foreign minister was born and educated in France and has had wide diplomatic experience. As the President-Director General of the National Investment Company, he is acquiring economic and financial experience. Bourquiba Jr. has had several sharp differences with his father.



We have done our best, but I don't know whether he will let us relieve him of responsibility.

Habib Bourguiba, Jr., Sept 70

In 1961-62 he strongly protested his father's unpopular divorce and subsequent marriage to his longtime mistress. Recently he unsuccessfully sought to moderate the President's vindictive attitude toward former economic czar Ahmed ben Salah. Although Bourquiba Jr. was a hard-working and effective foreign minister, he is reputed to be something of a playboy.



35. A possible dark horse is the 45-year-old Tunisian ambassador to France, BEJI CAID ES-SEBSI, a member of the party's liberal faction. Because of his effectiveness as minister of interior and minister of defense he has gained a solid reputation as a capable administrator. While he headed these ministries, he may have acquired some following within the security and military establishments. As a former student leader of the post - World War II era in France and as a participant in pre-independence negotiations



for autonomy, he probably developed other effective ties. He is reported to have resigned his present post as ambassador to France to protest Bourguiba's rejection of the consensus at the party's recent congress. He has nevertheless long been close to the President.